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FM AMEMBASSY MOGADISHU
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1329
INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
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AMEMBASSY ROME
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USCENTCOM REAR MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOGADISHU 11295

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
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SUBJ: DECEMBER 27, 1990 MEETING WITH PRESIDENT SIAD BARRE

11. (C) ENTIRE TEXT.

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12. SUMMARY: THE PRESIDENT POSED NO OBJECTION TO THE ORDERED DEPARTURE OF OUR PERSONNEL, NOR/OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF FUEL, EQUIPMENT AND CONTRACT PERSONNEL FROM BERBERA. HE SAID HE FEARED I HAD COME TO SAY ALL AMERICANS WERE LEAVING. HIS COMMENTS ON THE COUNTRY'S SITUATION WERE TERSE BUT REALISTIC. HE EXPRESSED DETERMINATION TO CARRY ON BUT GAVE NO HINT OF ANY GAMEPLAN AND LAPSED ONCE INTO FATALISM. HE SEEMED TO BE IN GOOD PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH BUT NOT AT ALL INTERESTED IN EXTENDED DISCUSSION. END SUMMARY.

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13. PRESIDENT SIAD BARRE RECEIVED ME AT MY REQUEST DECEMBER 27, 1990. MY OBJECTIVE IN SEEKING THE MEETING, THE FIRST SINCE I PRESENTED MY CREDENTIALS IN SEPTEMBER, WAS TO MAKE A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF MIND OF A CHIEF OF STATE WHOM ONE NEVER SEES IN PUBLIC AND ONLY IN THE MOST FORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES ON TELEVISION. WE MET AT VILLA SOMALIA IN A BUILDING AND ROOM ONCE USED BY THE CABINET FOR ITS SESSIONS. SIAD ARRIVED AFTER I DID AND WAS ACCOMPANIED BY VICE MINISTER BASI FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND ANOTHER UNIDENTIFIED AIDE. I WAS ALONE.

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14. LEFT TO INITIATE THE DISCUSSION, I TOLD SIAD I HAD ASKED TO SEE HIM BECAUSE THERE HAD BEEN NO OCCASION TO SPEAK FOR THREE MONTHS AND BECAUSE I WANTED TO BRIEF HIM ON RECENT USG DECISIONS REGARDING SOMALIA, TO AVOID THE DANGER OF MISINTERPRETATION. AS THE PRESIDENT NODDED, I EXPLAINED THAT OUR RECENT EVACUATION OF NON-ESSENTIAL PERSONNEL HAD MADE IT NECESSARY TO SUSPEND OUR CIVIL AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS, WHICH WE WOULD RESUME ONCE SECURITY CONDITIONS MADE IT POSSIBLE. AS SIAD OFFERED NO COMMENT, I THEN TOLD HIM WE WERE WITHDRAWING FUEL, EQUIPMENT AND USG CONTRACT PERSONNEL FROM BERBERA, DUE TO PERSIAN GULF REQUIREMENTS.

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15. SIAD'S RESPONSE, WHEN I FINISHED MY BRIEF PRESENTATION, WAS THE APPARENTLY SERIOUS COMMENT. "O GOOD, I THOUGH YOU WERE COMING TO SAY GOODBYE AND TO TELL ME THE OTHER AMERICANS ALSO WERE LEAVING". CONTINUING, HE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD AND ACCEPTED THE DECISIONS I HAD DESCRIBED. DESCRIBING THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY AS "BAD", THE PRESIDENT ADDED, "AND I AM A LITTLE BIT OLD". HE CONCLUDED HIS RESPONSE WITH THE COMMENT, "AND WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN".

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16. FOR THE NEXT TEN MINUTES I TRIED TO DRAW THE ELDERLY PRESIDENT INTO CONVERSATION BUT COULD ELICIT ONLY BRIEF RESPONSES TO THE SUBJECTS I RAISED. HE WAS ANXIOUS TO TERMINATE THE MEETING AND PROBABLY WOULD HAVE DONE SO, EXCEPT FOR THE FACT THAT THE JUICE HE HAD OFFERED HAD NOT YET ARRIVED. WHEN I MENTIONED USG

DISAPPOINTMENT AT THE COLLAPSE OF THE CAIRO ROUNDTABLE AND ASKED IF SOME OTHER INITIATIVE WERE UNDERWAY, SIAD REPLIED, "THEY CAN COME HERE AND TALK IF THEY WANT TO". ASKED IF HE WAS LOOKING FOR ANY FURTHER HELP FROM THE USG OR OTHER NATIONS IN PROMOTING PEACEFUL RECONCILIATION, HIS COMMENT WAS THAT "GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES". WHEN I NOTED THE PASSAGE OF THE LEGISLATION ESTABLISHING GROUND RULES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF POLITICAL PARTIES, HE SAID HE THOUGHT ONE OR TWO ALREADY HAD REGISTERED. THEN HE HAD AN APPARENTLY INCONCLUSIVE EXCHANGE IN SOMALI WITH HIS AIDES ON THE SUBJECT. HE REPEATED AGAIN THAT THE SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY WAS BAD, NOTING AT ONE POINT THAT WHAT HAPPENS IS "UP TO GOD".

17. AFTER OUR JUICE ARRIVED, AND APPARENTLY JUST TO MAKE CONVERSATION, SIAD SAID HE UNDERSTOOD PRESIDENT BUSH TOO WAS IN TROUBLE. WHEN I ASKED HIM TO ELABORATE, HE ASKED INSTEAD WHEN THE PRESIDENT WILL LAUNCH THE ATTACK ON IRAQ. WITH A SMILE I TOLD HIM THAT THE DATE HAD NOT BEEN SHARED WITH THE EMBASSY. WE THEN EXCHANGED NEW YEARS GREETINGS AND PARTED.

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18. COMMENT: SIAD'S STRIDE WAS VIGOROUS FOR A MAN IN HIS EIGHTIES, HIS HANDSHAKE WAS FIRM, AND HIS MIND WAS ALERT. HAVING HAD TO LISTEN THE PREVIOUS DAY TO THE SOMALI AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON INSIST FOR AN HOUR THAT THE SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY IS IN ALL IMPORTANT RESPECTS NORMAL, AND HAVING BEEN TOLD BY ADMIRAL MARINO THAT PEACE HAD RETURNED TO THE NORTHWEST AS WE CHATTED WHILE I WAITED FOR SIAD, I WAS SURPRISED BY THE PRESIDENT'S REALISM IN ACKNOWLEDGING THE REGIME'S PLIGHT. HOWEVER, HE IS CONSIDERABLY SMARTER THAN MY OTHER TWO INTERLOCUTORS AND CERTAINLY WISE ENOUGH TO REALIZE HE WOULD HAVE NO CREDIBILITY PRETENDING TO ANYONE LIVING IN MOGADISHU THAT CONDITIONS HERE RESEMBLE NORMALCY. RECOGNIZING OUR PREOCCUPATION WITH HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, HE PROBABLY ALSO SAW NO MILEAGE IN TOUTING THE REGIME'S MILITARY AND POLICE INITIATIVES. PERHAPS HE RECOGNIZES THEIR LIMITATIONS. MY GENERAL IMPRESSION WAS THAT I WAS DEALING WITH A WORRIED MAN WHO DOES NOT FEEL HE HAS A GAMEPLAN WHICH WILL ALLOW HIM TO OVERCOME THE PROBLEMS BEFORE HIM. NEVERTHELESS HE SEEMED INTENT TO MUDDLE ON, GIVING NO HINT THAT HE MIGHT BE THINKING OF HEADING TOWARD THE EXIT.

BISHOP